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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 000153

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DEPARTMENT FOR DRL/IRF, NEA/ELA

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TAGS: [PGOV PHUM KIRF KISL EG KPAO](#)
SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COMMISSION VISITS EGYPT - SECTARIAN ATTACK
DOMINATES DISCUSSIONS

REF: CAIRO 140; CAIRO 59; 09 CAIRO 477; 09 CAIRO 1109; 09 CAIRO 453
09 CAIRO 2229

CLASSIFIED BY: Donald Blome, Minister-Counselor for Economic and
Political Affairs, State, ECPO; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (SBU) A delegation from the United States International Religious Freedom Commission (USCIRF), consisting of three commissioners and three staff members led by the USCIRF chairman, visited Cairo from January 22 to 26. The delegation met with the Minister of Islamic Endowments, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs human rights official, the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights, human rights activists, and representatives of minority religious communities, Muslim and non-Muslim. The delegation, at the request of the GoE, agreed to defer travel to Upper Egypt because of ongoing tensions following the Naga Hamadi sectarian attack (refs A and B.) Although the delegation made no public statements, it attracted intense press attention, mostly critical of the USCIRF's "interference" in Egypt's "internal affairs."

Minister of Islamic Endowments and NCHR on Naga Hamadi

12. (C) Discussions with Hamdi Zagzoug, Minister of Islamic Endowments (Awqaf), focused on the January 6 killings in Naga Hamadi (refs A and B). According to Zagzoug, the killings were a response to the November rape of a Muslim girl by a Coptic man. Zagzoug asserted that such "honor crimes" occur regularly and only receive Western media attention when both Christians and Muslims are involved. Zagzoug said that "all Muslim leaders" criticized the "criminal act" and recounted how he travelled to Naga Hamadi after the attack to offer condolences to the victims' families.

13. (C) Kamal Aboul Magd, Vice President of the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), told the delegation that it

MFA on Naga Hamadi and Defamation

14. (C) Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Wael Aboul Magd told the delegation that "societal violence" between Muslims

15. (C) Addressing Egypt's sponsorship of the defamation of religions resolution in the United Nations, Aboul Magd said Egypt will continue to push the resolution. According to Aboul Magd, Egypt's goal is to protect Europe's Muslim community and encourage European countries to do the same.
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Church Leader on Security Services Harassment

16. (C) At the Qasr al Dubara Presbyterian Church, which works with Muslim converts to Christianity, Pastor Sameh Mories told the delegation that the church had recently been denied entry into Egypt by the GoE.

17. (C) At the Qasr al Dubara Church, the delegation met with Muslim convert to Christianity XXXXXXXXXXXX, who unsuccessfully sued the GoE to compel it to recognize his conversion (refs C and D). XXXXXXXXXXXX, accompanied by XXXXXXXXXXXX, complained of harassment and threats from his family and society arising from his conversion. A USCIRF delegation member told XXXXXXXXXXXX that he pulled him aside after the meeting to request unspecified U.S. Government assistance.

Baha'is, Jehovah Witnesses and Quranists

18. (C) The delegation met with representatives of Egypt's Baha'i, Jehovah Witnesses and Quranists. Egyptian Baha'i leadership said that while the GoE continues to issue identification documents to unmarried Baha'is ("over 120" birth certificates and "30 to 40" national identification cards) in compliance with a judicial decision (ref E), the GoE has not issued documents to any married Baha'is as the GoE does not recognize Baha'i marriage. Jehovah Witness leadership complained of a December 2009 Administrative Court decision refusing to allow the Jehovah Witness community to register as a legal entity. Jehovah Witness leadership said the judge based his decision largely on Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda's 2005 statement that the Jehovah Witnesses are not Christians. The Jehovah Witnesses also complained of ongoing security service surveillance and threats. Quranist (a small heterodox Islamic group (ref F)) community members complained of on-going GoE harassment - including travel bans - and societal hostility, especially from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Sheikh Tantawi on Naga Hamadi, Baha'is

19. (C) Sheikh Tantawi, the head of Al Azhar, met twice with

the delegation. He condemned the Naga Hamadi attack which he attributed to "extremist" thinking. Tantawi said that in Al Azhar's view, there is no distinction between Muslims and Christians; all are Egy

Coptic Orthodox Church Declines to Meet with Delegation

¶10. (C) Pope Shenouda, the leader of the Coptic Orthodox Church, declined to meet with the delegation. In public statements, Shenouda attributed his refusal to the Church's "rejection of foreign interferenc
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church was under "intense pressure from security services" not to meet with the USCIRF. The official also said that the Church feared it would be blamed by the GoE if it met with the delegation and the USCIRF

Intense Press Interest

¶11. (SBU) The visit generated intense press coverage, much of it focused on the timing in the aftermath of the Naga Hamadi attack and highlighting Pope Shenouda's refusal to meet the delegation. Both pro-government and opposition party press accused the USCIRF of "interference in Egyptian internal affairs" and called the timing of the visit "suspicious." Commentaries in the pro-government press were

¶12. (U) The USCIRF delegation did not clear this message.
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